

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

----- 066700

O 051835Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8242

INFO AMCONSUL TANGIER IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RABAT 1889

EXDIS

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AMGT MO US

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE CLOSURE OF CONSULATE GENERAL IN TANGIER

REF: STATE 080569

1. REFTTEL INDICATES THAT PPG HAS RECOMMENDED CLOSING TANGIER, THAT FINAL DECISION WILL BE MADE AFTER APRIL 7, AND THAT EMBASSY COMMENTS WOULD BE WELCOME. SINCE MY ARRIVAL IN MID-MARCH, I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO EXAMINE THIS SUBJECT IN MORE DETAIL THAN WAS POSSIBLE IN WASHINGTON. THE REDUCTION WHICH TOOK EFFECT A YEAR AGO FROM A THREE-MAN TO A TWO-MAN POST IS JUSTIFIED, BUT CLOSING THE POST ENTIRELY IS ANOTHER STORY. THERE ARE MANY ARGUEMENTS IN FAVOR OF CONTINUING OUR HISTORIC PRESENCE IN TANGIER. AS I SEE IT, THERE ARE THREE PRINCIPAL ONES OF OVERRIDING IMPORTANCE:

2. POLITICAL JUSTIFICATION: MOROCCO IS A COMPLEX COUNTRY AND THE MID- TO LONG-RANGE FUTURE OF THE PRESENT REGIME IS TO SAY THE LEAST UNCERTAIN. THE TANGIER CONSULAR DISTRICT, WHICH ENCOMPASSES THE AREA OF THE NORTHERN SPANISH PROTECTORATE BEFORE INDEPENDENCE, IS CULTURALLY, TO SOME EXTENT LINGUISTICALLY, AND HISTORICALLY DISTINCT FROM THE REST OF THE COUNTRY AND HAS ALWAYS BEEN A REGION MARKED BY

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ITS INDEPENDENT AND EVEN SEPARATIST TENDENCIES. POLITICAL

REPORTING ON THE DISTRICT FROM THE CONSULATE GENERAL HAS NOT BEEN DISTINGUISHED IN RECENT YEARS, BUT I AM DETERMINED THAT THIS WILL CHANGE, RAPIDLY AND RADICALLY. IN LOOKING TO THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF THIS COUNTRY, WE MUST KNOW MORE ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON, PROVIDE A BETTER PICTURE OF OUR FOREIGN POLICY, AND ESTABLISH PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WHICH COULD BE USEFUL IN CASE OF A CHANGE IN REGIME.

3. THERE ARE OTHER ASPECTS TO THIS POLITICAL ARGUMENT. U.S. NAVAL BASE FACILITIES AT KENITRA AND SIDI YAHIA ARE ALMOST CERTAINLY GOING TO BE PHASED OUT IN THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS AS TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES REMOVE THEIR PRESENT NEED. FOR US TO PRECEDE THIS HIGHLY VISIBLE ACTION BY ELIMINATING THE NEARLY 200-YEAR-OLD U.S. CONSULAR PRESENCE IN TANGIER, HISTORICALLY THE DIPLOMATIC CAPITAL OF THE COUNTRY, WOULD INEVITABLY CONTRIBUTE TO AN ATMOSPHERE OF POPULAR AND OFFICIAL DOUBT IN MOROCCO AS TO THE IMPORTANCE WHICH AMERICA ATTACHES TO THIS COUNTRY. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE NOW WHEN TENSIONS IN THE MAHGREB ARE HIGH AND HASSAN HAS REPEATEDLY SOUGHT CLOSER RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. ACTION ON THE KENITRA COMPLEX OR ON OUR PRESENCE IN TANGIER COULD GIVE JUST THE WRONG SIGNAL AT A TIME WE ARE TELLING THE MOROCCANS OF OUR TRADITIONALLY INTIMATE RELATIONS WITH THEIR COUNTRY. SUCH A WRONG SIGNAL COULD JEOPARDIZE OUR CONTINUED U.S. NAVAL AND VOA COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS AT SIDI YAHIA AND TANGIER RESPECTIVELY AND COULD REVERSE THE CURRENT GOM DESIRE TO INCREASE ITS COOPERATION WITH US--AN ATTITUDE THAT IS CERTAINLY IN OUR INTEREST EVEN THOUGH SOME OF THE OPPORTUNITIES IT OFFERS TO US MAY NOT BE ONES WE CHOOSE TO EXPLOIT.

4. ANOTHER POLITICAL RATIONALE IS THAT CONSULATE GENERAL TANGIER IS THE ONLY POINT FROM WHICH THE USG CAN DIRECTLY COVER AND REPORT ON THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF THE THREE STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT ENCLAVES OF GIBRALTAR, CEUTA AND MELILLA. WHAT HAPPENS IN THESE AREAS WILL GROW INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT IN THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS AS THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF SPAIN UNFOLDS.

5. CONSULAR JUSTIFICATION: TANGIER HAS LONG BEEN A MECCA FOR AMERICAN TOURISTS. ONE FACT, WHICH NEITHER SCA NOR CONFIDENTIAL

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I KNEW DURING MY WASHINGTON CONSULTATIONS AND WHICH WAS NOT INCLUDED IN THE JUSTIFICATION EXERCISE A YEAR AGO, IS THAT 86,000 AMERICANS ENTERED THE CITY IN 1975 FOR AN AVERAGE STAY OF THREE DAYS. IN STATISTICAL TERMS THAT WORKS OUT TO ONE QUARTER OF A MILLION TOURIST DAYS FOR A YEAR THAT WAS BY NO MEANS EXCEPTIONAL--AMERICAN ENTRIES IN FACT WERE DOWN BY 30 PERCENT FROM 1974 BECAUSE OF POLITICAL TENSIONS IN THIS AREA.

6. TANGIER'S WELFARE AND WHEREABOUTS CASES, FAR EXCEED THOSE OF RABAT AND CASABLANCA COMBINED. MOREOVER, A STEADY STREAM OF AMERICANS TURN TO THE CONSULATE FOR REASONS OTHER THAN THOSE REFLECTED IN NORMAL CONSULAR WORKLOAD STATISTICS. DUE TO LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, THESE OF NECESSITY INCLUDE ASSISTING WITH COMPLAINTS AGAINST LOCAL MERCHANTS, HELPING TO SETTLE ARGUMENTS WITH TRAVEL AGENTS AND HOTELS, ASSISTANCE IN DEALING WITH POLICE IN INSTANCES OF THEFT AND ACCIDENT, COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEMS AND MANY OTHERS. ADVICE IS PROVIDED CONCERNING WHICH AREAS OF COUNTRY TO AVOID DURING PERIODS OF TENSION AND HOW TO HAVE FUNDS TRANSFERRED FROM THE UNITED STATES IN CASES OF FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES. DRUG PROBLEMS ALSO TAKE A GREAT DEAL OF TIME. ALL OF THESE SERVICES, OF COURSE, ARE NOT CONFINED TO TANGIER. OFFICERS ARE FREQUENTLY ON TO ROAD TO OTHER PARTS OF THE CONSULAR DISTRICT, CEUTA IN PARTICULAR BEING A PITFALL FOR YOUNG AMERICANS WITH DRUGS. POST PERSONNEL HAVE PREVIOUSLY EXAMINED THE POSSIBILITY OF PROVIDING THESE SERVICES FROM RABAT, BUT THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE SINCE MOST OF THE SERVICES RENDERED REQUIRE ON-THE-SPOT ACTION. BECAUSE OF THE LARGE NUMBERS OF TOURISTS WHO TRANSIT NORTHER MOROCCO EACH YEAR THE PUBLIC RELATIONS BENEFITS TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR BEING ABLE TO PROVIDE PROMPT AND EFFICIENT SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC ARE INNUMERABLE.

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O 051835Z APR 76

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INFO AMCONSUL TANGIER IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 RABAT 1889

EXDIS

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON FROM AMBASSADOR

7. ANOTHER NEW FACT HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO MY ATTENTION. SINCE THE BEGINNING OF 1976, TOUR ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN TANGIER HOTEL OPERATORS AND AMERICAN ASSOCIATIONS OF RETIRED PERSONS HAVE BROUGHT THOUSANDS OF ELDERLY AMERICANS TO TANGIER FOR PERIODS OF SIX WEEKS. DURING FEBRUARY, THE PEAK PERIOD FOR THESE OFF-SEASON TOURS, THERE WERE AS MANY AS 1800 RETIRED AMERICANS IN TANGIER AT ONE TIME. THIS INFLUX OF ELDERLY TOURISTS HAS PLACED A SIGNIFICANT ADDITIONAL WORKLOAD ON THE CONSULATE GENERAL.

8. OTHER AGENCY INTEREST: THE VOICE OF AMERICA: CLOSURE OF THE TANGIER CONSULATE GENERAL WOULD PROBABLY FORCE THE CLOSURE OF THE TANGIER VOA RELAY BASE, FOR WHICH USIA HAS NO POSSIBLE ADEQUATE SUBSTITUTE AT THIS TIME. FURTHERMORE, IF OPERATION OF THE BASE WERE ATTEMPTED IN THE ABSENCE OF THE CONSULAT GENERAL, THE INCREASE IN COSTS WOULD MORE THAN OFFSET ANY SAVINGS EFFECTED BY CLOSURE OF THE CONSULATE GENERAL.

9. THE 1959 US-GOM AGREEMENT COVERING THE TANGIER VOA RELAY BASE WAS NEGOTIATED IN THE POLITICALLY CHARGED ATMOSPHERE OF THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD WHEN FEELING WAS RUNNING HIGH AGAINST MILITARY BASES. THE ONLY WAY TO SIDESTEP THE CONNOTATION THAT THE VOA RELAY BASE FELL WITHIN THIS UNACCEPTABLE FRAMEWORK WAS TO WORK OUT AN AGREEMENT TREATING VOA STRICTLY AS A BUSINESS OPERATION RATHER THAN A U.S. CONFIDENTIAL

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GOVERNMENT ENDEAVOR. THE AGREEMENT SPECIFICALLY STATES THAT "VOA SHALL BE SUBJECTED TO MOROCCAN LAWS, REGULATIONS AND JURISDICTION". IN PRACTICE IT HAS BEEN POSSIBLE TO EVADE THE ONEROUS PROVISIONS OF THE AGREEMENT BY PLACING VOA RELAY BASE PERSONNEL UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF THE TANGIER CONSULATE GENERAL. THEY HAVE THEREBY BEEN ABLE TO AVOID PAYING THE PROHIBITIVE LOCAL CUSTOMS FEES AND OTHER TAXES. IF THE PROTECTION OF THE CONSULATE GENERAL WERE REMOVED, IT IS ESTIMATED THAT EACH OF THE NINE AMERICAN EMPLOYEES SERVING AT THE VOA RELAY BASE WOULD BE REQUIRED TO PAY \$20,000 OR MORE IN LOCAL TAXES FOR HOUSEHOLD EFFECTS, CARS, ETC. THOSE NOW SERVING HERE COULD BE EXPECTED TO REQUEST IMMEDIATE TRANSFER. EVEN IF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO PAY THESE TAXES, VOA PERSONNEL WOULD BE UNWILLING TO SERVE IN A COUNTRY WHERE THEY WOULD ENJOY NO PRIVILEGES OR IMMUNITIES WHATEVER. MOREOVER, IF AN ATTEMPT WAS MADE TO MAINTAIN THE VOA RELAY BASE IN THE ABSENCE OF THE CONSULATE GENERAL, THE PURELY ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES WHICH WOULD BE REQUIRED, SUCH AS CONSTRUCTION OF NEW ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES AND CLASSIFIED STORAGE FACILITIES, AS WELL AS THE NEED TO PROVIDE THE MANIFOLD ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES NOW PROVIDED BY THE CONSULATE GENERAL UNDER THE CAMO OPERATION, WOULD FURTHER INCREASE COSTS.

10. THE TANGIER VOA RELAY BASE IS A VITAL PART OF THE VOA EUROPEAN RELAY SYSTEM, AND IS IDEALLY LOCATED GEOGRAPHICALLY FOR ITS PURPOSES. I AM TOLD THAT WITHOUT TANGIER VOA WOULD LOSE A LARGE PART OF ITS CAPABILITY TO REACH IMPORTANT TARGETS IN EASTERN EUROPE. I UNDERSTAND VOA WILL BE ASKING DIRECTOR KEOGH TO WEIGH IN WITH YOU ON THIS SUBJECT.

11. CONCLUSION: I HOPE THE FOREGOING WILL BE USEFUL IN HAVING THE PPG RECONSIDER ITS RECOMMENDATION ON TANGIER. YOU MAY ASSURE LARRY EAGLEBURGER THAT I AM TAKING A HARD LOOK MISSION-WIDE AT THE USE OF OUR RESOURCES, THAT I HAVE COME UP WITH ONE OFFICER POSITION IN AID TO ABOLISH AND HOPE TO FIND ANOTHER ONE OR TWO IN THAT ORGANIZATION, THAT I MAY RECOMMEND THE REDUCTION OF ONE OFFICER SLOT IN CASABLANCA, AND THAT AS I BECOME MORE FAMILIAR WITH THE MULTIFARIOUS OPERATIONS HERE, I WILL BE SEEKING ECONOMIES WHEREVER POSSIBLE, INCLUDING TANGIER.

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12. YOU MAY RECALL AT THE TIME OF MY NOMINATION CONCERN WAS EXPRESSED BY THE PALACE THAT THE CHANGE IN AMBASSADORS MIGHT REPRESENT A CHANGE IN POLICY TOWARDS MOROCCO. THE KING WAS REASSURED IT DID NOT. THE CLOSING OF TANGIER WOULD CERTAINLY NOT RECONFIRM THIS ASSURANCE.

13. ON THE BASIS OF THE FACTS GIVEN ME BY THE COUNTRY TEAM, I CAN ONLY SUGGEST THAT THE CLOSURE OF TANGIER WOULD DAMAGE IMPORTANT U.S. BILATERAL AND REGIONAL INTERESTS, AND WOULD CURTAIL SERVICES TO MANY THOUSANDS OF AMERICANS.
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